

What bravery looks like

Courtney Kirkman is a 21-year-old student at Meridian Community College, and plans to transfer to the University of West Alabama for nursing school. She enjoys spending time with friends and family and attending Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Meridian. "My hope for the future," she said, "is to become a successful nurse and help others in any way possible."

Her hero is her brother, Airman 1st Class James Morphis. The 22-year-old served five months in Iraq and is currently stationed in Misawa, Japan, as part of the 35th Civil Engineering Squadron of the 35th Fighting Wing of the U.S. Air Force.

Military service runs in the family. Courtney's uncle, Master Sgt. James Bunyard, U.S. Air Force, is fire chief for the 186th Air Refueling Wing in Meridian. Her late grandfather, George Joel Bunyard, was a technical sergeant in the U.S. Air Force.

Courtney wrote this story in December, when her thoughts were with "Jamie" Morphis as he celebrated Christmas far from home.



Airman 1st Class James Morphis, left, and his sister, Courtney Kirkman

By Courtney Kirkman
special to The Star

A large, brown box filled with Christmas gifts and pictures of family members is on its way to Misawa, Japan. On the outside, this box looks like any ordinary box, but to a young soldier, this is his window to home.

Airman 1st Class James "Jamie" Morphis of the U.S. Air force has not been home to stay in more than two years.

After basic training in San Antonio, Texas, he was sent to technical school in Missouri and, from there, he was sent to his first duty station in Misawa, Japan. At the age of 22, he was sent to Iraq, where he served his country for five months.

Jamie is now spending the

remainder of his time in Japan until he receives his orders for his next duty station. This letter is intended to brag on my brother and to let him know we still think about him every day. Jamie is brave, loving and, most of all, a great brother.

Now is the time

I can remember the day he signed up for the Air Force like it was yesterday. It was a sad day for everyone but him.

One night, before he left for boot camp, I asked him why he would sign up for any branch of the military at wartime — knowing that his chances of being sent to war were much greater. And I will never forget what he said: "Why not? This is when they need me the most. Now is the

best time."

At that moment, I understood what it means to be dedicated to serving your country. A short time later, Jamie called to let me know that his unit would soon be deployed to Iraq. I was really scared for him, a young country boy from Meridian, who was so far away from home. He told me he would try to call as much as possible to let us know he was OK.

My mother and I began to use the old saying, "No news is good news," quite often. When we did hear from him, he was not scared at all. He said, "I know God can take of me, I'm not worried."

Jamie is a great example of what modern day bravery looks like.

The universal language

Secondly, I would like to brag on how he is such a

loving person. Before Jamie ever decided to go into the military, I knew he would do great things.

Anyone who knows him loves him. He always has that little sneaky smirk on his face that could make anyone laugh. He would give the shirt off his back if he thought you needed it.

He told me about an Iraqi man he met. He said, "I saw this man broke down on the side of the road, so I gave him a lift. I was a little uncomfortable because he didn't speak English, but after I helped him, he flashed a peace sign at me. I knew that meant thanks."

This did not surprise me a bit. Jamie is just an all-around good guy.

My big brother

Last, but certainly not least, I want to brag on how Jamie has been a great brother to me. He is only 14 months older than I am, which made us very close growing up.

He has taken care of me since the day I was born, so I'm told. He can do or say anything bad about me, but let someone else do it, and he is ready to fight. We have been through everything together from chicken pox to getting our tonsils taken out.

After high school, I chose to get married and he chose the military. He jokes that we both made about the same sacrifices. He says, "Now we both are committed to letting someone else boss us around for the rest of our lives."

He is probably right, but we both chose a path in life that would lead to happiness in the end. For him, the Air force is the best place to be. He can aim high to reach his goals in life.

Although Jamie will not be home for Christmas this year, I want him to know that he is in my heart and prayers every day. He is a brave, loving brother to me and his smile is greatly missed. If I know him, he would not consider himself great at all, which makes him even better.

I will always look up to him and I am very proud of him.

SPEAK UP

The Meridian Star asked members of the Stephenson-DeLauney Post 79 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Meridian to answer the question: "What do you have to say to the men and women serving in Iraq?" Here's what they said.

Chuck McElroy: "You are doing a great job ... I pray every day for their safety and that they come back soon the way they went over there. I'm proud of them. They do what they are told to do. The national media should leave them alone and let them do their job."

A U.S. Army veteran who served in Operation Desert Storm, 70-year-old Chuck McElroy is retired and lives in Lauderdale County.



McElroy

Betty Griffin: "Good luck to everybody ... I want them to do their job as it should be done and I'm proud of them. Every one of them are in my prayers that they will be brought home safely."

"Do what your commanders tell you to do. Make America proud and each and every one of you keep the freedom of the people and by the people. It's you who are keeping us free in this world. May God bless each and every one of you and bring you home safely."

Retiree Betty Griffin, 68, lives in Meridian. She is conductress and poppy chairman of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary.



Griffin

Bob Gray: "We're proud of them. They are doing a good job ... Keep up the good work. None of you has to be a hero, but you all need to come home."

A U.S. Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, 61-year-old Bob Gray is retired and lives in Meridian.

Sylvia Compton: "Of course, they are first in our hearts and minds. We want them first to be as safe as they can. We understand what our husbands of previous wars have faced — the emotions, the heartbreak and the dangers. All of our hearts will mend when they return ... be home safe soon."

Retiree Sylvia Compton, 66, is retired and lives in the Clarkdale community. She is the president of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary.



Compton

Harvey Speed: "God bless you ... Most of us older fellows have been through things that reflect memories of home. One of the major things servicemen need when they are overseas are things that uplift their spirits."

"We fought for the right of our families to live their lives the way they want to and we need to support them. Our government needs to support them and we need to pray for them, that they will come home safely."

Harvey Speed, 55, of Meridian takes care of maintenance for an apartment complex. He is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force who was stationed in Korea during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

George Chatham: "We are proud of you ... They are doing a good job. It's a shame they do not have the support from every aspect of the United States they deserve. We are very fortunate to have them fighting for our country."

A U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War, 74-year-old George Chatham is retired and lives in Meridian.

John Taylor: "If they would let me, I'd be back with them today ... Keep up the good work."

"My thoughts are with them every single day. I back them 1,000 percent. You have my full support and the support of my family."

John Taylor, 74, of Meridian, is retired. He is a U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War and the Vietnam War and has served in Lebanon, at the Suez Canal and in the Dominican Republic.



Taylor